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March 8, 2007

Virginia Recreational Fishing Advisory Board
C/O Jack Travelstead
Virginia Marine Resources Commission

Newport News, VA 23607

Dear RFAB Members:

The CCA of Virginia Fisheries Management Committee has reviewed the proposals submitted to your board and has formed the following positions.

Multi-Year Projects for Renewal:

A. 2007 Sunshine Children's Fishing Program (\$7,194). **SUPPORT.** As you know, our members have a long and consistent history of supporting recreational and educational endeavors such as this project and the next two below. Their relatively modest cost is overshadowed by the positive dividends they yield in exposing an expanding number of children to the fun and conservation ethic of sportfishing. Our hope is that such projects will ensure successive generations share a common commitment to preserve our saltwater resources.

B. 2007 Saxis & Morley's Wharf Fishing Pier Youth Fishing Tournament (\$2,500). **SUPPORT.**

C. 2007 Early Summer Children's Fishing Program (\$1,100). **SUPPORT.**

D. Artificial Reef, Funding for Development of Structure 2006-2007 (\$150,000). **SUPPORT.** As in previous funding cycles, our organization enthusiastically supports this effort to expand the scope of quality habitat that is especially conducive to the sustainment of recreationally important finfish. In fact, we **actually encourage an even greater allocation of funds** in the near-term in order to augment/develop additional planned/existing reef sites. Again, these efforts, more than any others entertained by the fund, directly support the state's recreational anglers.

E. Visual Function in Chesapeake Bay Sport and Prey Fishes: Summer Flounder, Bluefish, Cobia, and Atlantic Menhaden (Year 2) (\$50,289). **QUALIFIED SUPPORT.** Our lack of support for the initial segment of this study (striped bass, weakfish, spotted seatrout, Atlantic croaker, spot, and red drum) in 2005 was due to the proposal's failure to sufficiently demonstrate direct benefit to recreational anglers or to the management of these species. However, the sponsors subsequently produced quarterly status reports and presented some of their findings to angler forums. Subsequently, we gave qualified support in 2006 for another segment of the study with the understanding that the "big picture" results of the research would be codified in a way (such as in the next version of the Virginia Saltwater Angler's Guide, etc.) that would be accessible to a majority of anglers. While we applaud the continued efforts by the petitioners to present

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their findings to the angling community, our “qualification” this cycle is based on where we feel this project falls in the overall context of all the other submitted projects competing for funds. Therefore, we feel it should be near the bottom of those projects for which we recommend approval.

F. Estimating Relative Abundance of Young-of-year American Eel, in the Virginia Tributaries of the Chesapeake Bay (Year 7) (\$36,325). **DO NOT SUPPORT.** Our continued negative stance regarding this proposal is based on its marginal benefit to the recreational fishing sector. Therefore, little has changed from our statement of two years ago – “we did not support this project last year and our position remains unchanged in that this effort does not directly benefit mainstream saltwater Virginia anglers. As we noted last year, eels are a species of growing commercial interest. Consequently, funding for this and other related projects on eel research should first be sought from that sector.” The fact that eels are a bait of growing significance for striped bass and cobia does not in itself justify support to the project. In another vein, it should be noted that this species is in part addressed in the overall trawl survey in item “H” below.

G. Enhancing Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) Habitat: Research and Education for Restoration (\$95,689). **SUPPORT.** Yet another project where we have had a long, consistent position. In this case, we have been a strong advocate for this long-running project to restore one of the most vital environments along our coast. While we would hope that some degree of federal funding would be forth coming for the program’s sustainment, we would still advocate funding by the board. However, an extract of our comments from previous cycles still reflects our strong opinion regarding the need for equal support from the commercial sector -- “we continue to feel the commercial sector should bear an equal cost in this and other SAV projects. The restored areas should be declared off limits to all forms of commercial fishing, if commercial funds are not forthcoming for this effort. Even if commercial funding would arise, those commercial activities deemed “detrimental” (haul seining, with associated prop scarring or any type of dredging) to this habitat should be prohibited. The lack of such safeguards would not only jeopardize the health of this habitat, but would also curtail any future support for using recreational monies in this regard.”

H. Estimating Relative Juvenile Abundance of Recreationally Important Finfish and Crustaceans in the Virginia Portion of Chesapeake Bay (\$469,568). **PARTIAL SUPPORT.** The overall importance of this long-running study cannot be denied. While we have supported the last several requests for funding of this program, we are concerned the fund will always be burdened with supporting this study. As in the past, we would also suggest that VIMS persist in seeking support for this reoccurring project from the General Assembly. In the near-term, the RFAB contribution for support of this survey should be **no more than ½** of the stated request, given that the commercial sector derives at least an equal benefit for the results of the project.

New Projects:

I. Virginia Marine Sportfish Collection (Year1) (\$12,000). **SUPPORT.** This relatively low cost project should appreciably augment the data base on several species that are of growing interest/concern to the local recreational angling community. Cobia, red drum, and speckled trout all represent important niche recreational fisheries in which there is less than an optimal level of knowledge necessary to effectively manage what should ideally be expanding populations of specimens characterized by robust numbers of trophy sized specimens. Blueline tilefish and snowy grouper have both experienced recent interest from

“deep drop” anglers, while at the same time, engendering concern for their continued abundance in the light of increasing angler pressure.

J. SAS Licensing and Training for VMRC Technical Staff (\$38,500). **PARTIAL SUPPORT.** While the request highlights the value of using SAS software to interpret MRFSS data, it also alludes the use of this software in other applications, including trawl surveys. Given this cross-cutting role in analyzing data pertinent to both the recreational and commercial sector, recommend RFAB fund **no more than** $\frac{3}{4}$ of the requested amount.

K. Quinby Harbor Enhancements (\$38,500). **SUPPORT.** This access project would appear to be a classic example of one that provides immediate benefit to the recreational community. Even though commercial vessels will apparently make some use of the facility, its overall intent seems focused on providing greater access to recreational users in the form of the launching ramp and floating pier/dock. However, we would recommend the board seek additional information regarding the fishing pier. In the project proposal it is variously listed as both a floating dock and fishing pier. If it is intended to be the latter, it would seem that railing, handicap access, etc. provisions be incorporated, which could be less than desirable for a floating “dock”. Since the proposal makes no reference to user fees, it is assumed that access to both the ramp and pier is at no cost to the user. As RFAB funds will offset the majority of the project’s cost, recommend the board stipulate the facilities remain free to recreational license holders.

L. Saxis Fishing Pier Expansion (\$132,107). **SUPPORT.** This proposal, as well as those at “D” and “K” above, best epitomizes the highest priority of this license fund – namely increased access/angling opportunities for the state’s licensed recreational anglers. We agree the 200 foot extension, and associated tee-head, should greatly improve the utility and value of this structure. In its enhanced form, it should be a destination of greater importance/value to both the local community and tourists along the Eastern Shore.

M. 2007 Hope House Fishing Excursion and Clinic (\$2,500). **SUPPORT.** A laudable initiative, consistent with the purposes of the fund, to expose these residents to the finfish resources of the Chesapeake Bay.

N. Abundance, Distribution and Biology of Sharks and Rays in Chesapeake Bay and Virginia’s Coastal Lagoons: Continuation of a Long-term Monitoring and Research Program (\$89,073). **DO NOT SUPPORT.** Our lack of support for this project is not in any way a rejection of its value to the scientific community. We also agree that a healthy shark population is an important component of the overall coastal and bay ecosystems. However, given the fact that the fund does not have sufficient resources to support all requests, and that this research did not provide a direct near-term benefit to significant numbers of the angling community, we cannot lend our support to this request at this time. It is hoped the petitioners will be able to regain their previous level of financial support from the National Shark Research Consortium in the near future.

O. Response of Summer Founder to Hypoxia in Chesapeake Bay: Physiological Tolerances and Shifts in Habitat Use (\$99,721). **QUALIFIED PARTIAL SUPPORT.** We feel this project should merit funding from the board only if there are sufficient funds remaining after support has been provided to other requests we have recommended for approval during this cycle. In contrast to project “N” above,

March 8, 2007
Virginia Recreational Fishing Advisory Board
C/O Jack Travelstead
Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Page 4

this research has a bearing on what is one of the most widely sought recreational species in our waters. However, as flounder are also a very significant commercial target, the commercial sector should fund at least ½ of the cost associated with this research.

P. Effects of Piscivorous Fishes on Local Juvenile Game Fish Populations (\$45,530). **QUALIFIED PARTIAL SUPPORT.** As with requests "O" and "Q", RFAB funding for this request should only be allocated if there is sufficient funding after support has been provided to other requests that have more immediate benefit to recreational anglers. As this project may yield information useful to the long-range management of such species as striped bass and shad, it is along appropriate for the commercial fund to support at least ½ of the requested cost for this study.

Q. Laboratory Investigations of the Ability of Striped Bass to Function under Low Ambient Oxygen Conditions (\$81,468). **QUALIFIED PARTIAL SUPPORT.** Our support, and reservations, on this request are basically identical to those noted in project "O" above (similar study regarding flounder). Additionally, the similar nature of these two requests raises a logical question regarding the possibility of reducing overall expenses of these requests by consolidating them into one study, with a possibility of sharing some project costs. And finally, like both of the above studies, the recreational (RFAB) funding should support no more than ½ of the requested cost for this study.

R. Estimate and Assess Social and Economic Importance and Value of Menhaden to Chesapeake Bay Stakeholders and Region (3 Year Study) (Year 1 request \$363,403). **SUPPORT.** We are keenly interested in and wholeheartedly support an unbiased fact-based study on this topic. We encourage Dr. Kirkley to examine the potential impacts on all stakeholders, including the benefits from the harvest of the species. We agree with the petitioner's assertion that studies such as this are important to the process of transitioning from a species by species management scheme to an ecosystem management scheme. While there might be some that would object to using recreational license money to fund this study, we feel it is in the best interest of the recreational angling community to support funding of this project because menhaden are a primary forage species for many species recreational anglers target. Furthermore, we agree with the VMRC staff recommendation for sharing the cost between the commercial and recreational funds.

Other Issues:

We also support the "other" issues noted in the public hearing notice; namely, the request for additional funds to enhance the Newport News Saltwater Fishing Pier project, and the additional fees necessary for continued operation of the Virginia Saltwater Fishing Tournament. We recommend these requests, along with all those to which we lent unqualified support above, should be considered for approval over those we annotated for "qualified" support when "above and below the line" deliberations are made regarding available funding during this cycle.

We appreciated the opportunity to again express our views on the allocation of our state's license funds. Thank you for your consideration.

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